



Anthony E. Marks (1938–2025): Pioneer of the Palaeolithic

Jeffrey I. Rose¹ · Nuno Bicho¹ · Vitaly I. Usyk^{2,3} · Frank Winchell⁴

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Anthony “Tony” Edward Marks passed away on August 15, 2025, at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the age of 87. Tony’s passing marks the end of a remarkable career in archaeology that spanned nine countries, four continents, and a quarter million years of prehistory. Not only did he fundamentally shape how we understand the Palaeolithic record, but he transformed our very perception of lithic technology, teaching us how to find the profound depth of meaning in stone.

A proud New Yorker, Tony was born, raised, and educated in Manhattan. As a young student at Columbia University eager to pursue his love of European medieval art and churches, he was promptly taken aside by the anthropology department head, Marvin Harris, who (rather forcefully as Tony would recall) urged him to stick with archaeology. Tony’s professional career began with the UNESCO Nubian salvage campaigns of the 1960s. As Lake Nasser rose behind the Aswan High Dam, Tony mapped prehistoric sites along the east bank of the Nile before their inundation. During the Nubian salvage project, he documented several key Palaeolithic industries, including an array of assemblages defined by the presence of Nubian core technology. He could never know at the time how that discovery would unexpectedly resurface decades later, at the end of his career.

Tony’s approach to archaeology matured fully in the Negev desert. He and his team, including Paul Goldberg, Reid Ferring, Philip Volkman, and Harvey Crew, documented a complete regional sequence from the Middle Palaeolithic through the Neolithic, integrating lithic analysis, site structure, paleoenvironmental reconstruction, and settlement patterns. The results of this seminal research

program, presented in the three-volume series *Prehistory and Paleoenvironments in the Central Negev* (1976, 1977, 1983), established methodological standards for regional archaeology that remain influential today.

During the Negev project, while off looking for sediments as the rest of the team surveyed for lithics, Paul Goldberg found the site of Boker Tachtit, which would yield one of the most important Palaeolithic assemblages of the 20th century. Tony’s excavations at Boker Tachtit uncovered a transitional sequence showing the technological shift from Levallois-based Middle Palaeolithic reduction to blade-based Upper Palaeolithic technologies. Through groundbreaking refit studies, he and his student Philip Volkman demonstrated technological continuity bridging the two traditions, capturing a rare glimpse of a previously undocumented evolutionary process. Boker Tachtit also established an enduring enigma: whence came the Initial Upper Palaeolithic? To this day, scenarios of modern human dispersal into Eurasia still grapple with this question.

Following his work in the Negev, Tony returned to Sudan in the 1980s. His Butana Archaeological Project (BAP), in collaboration with the late Rodolfo Fattovich (University of Naples) and Abbas Mohammed-Ali (University of Khartoum), established the Mesolithic and Neolithic sequence for the region. The resulting volume, *The Late Prehistory of the Eastern Sahel*, demonstrated his commitment to training local archaeologists, which he consistently maintained throughout the rest of his career. Under Tony’s guidance, three dissertations were produced from the BAP by his students Karim Sadr, Stephen Mbutu (now deceased), and one of us (FW). Though he was known for his expertise in lithic analysis, Tony was a master of classification across a wide range of material culture. These skills proved essential for the work of Karim and FW, whose ceramic analyses remain foundational contributions to Neolithic studies in the eastern Sahel. For the rest of his career, Tony loved to tell the story of one Thanksgiving in Sudan when he asked the cook to prepare a turkey for dinner. Unfamiliar with what a turkey was, the cook served vulture instead. Whether or not Tony ate the vulture varied with the telling.

✉ Jeffrey I. Rose
jrose@ualg.pt

¹ ICArEHB, Universidade do Algarve, Faro, Portugal

² Ukraine Academy of Sciences, Kiev, Ukraine

³ Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague, Czechia

⁴ WSP USA, Arlington, Virginia, Manhattan, NY, USA

Beginning in the mid-1980s, Tony launched two major collaborative projects on either side of Europe. Alongside Ukrainian colleagues Victor Chabai, Yuri Demidenko, and one of us (VU), he assembled the first interdisciplinary team to bring together western archaeologists with those from the former Soviet Union. Excavating at Crimean Middle Palaeolithic sites including Kabazi, Starosele (Fig. 1), and Buran Kaya III, the team revealed extraordinary variability in Neanderthal technological organization. Tony's findings demonstrated that Crimean Neanderthals employed diverse strategies adapted to different ecological and social contexts, challenging simplistic contrasts between Neanderthals and modern humans. The discovery of intrusive human burials at Starosele challenged previous claims of a Neanderthal child burial and fueled ongoing debates about Neanderthal symbolic behavior.

Simultaneously, working with João Zilhão in Portugal, Tony co-directed excavations spanning the Lower through Upper Palaeolithic periods (and, to his dismay, a gunflint factory from the Napoleonic War). Tony supervised multiple Portuguese students, including one of us (NB), who went on to found both the *Journal of Paleolithic Archaeology* and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Archaeology and Evolution of Human Behavior (ICArEHB) at the University

of Algarve, where Tony's intellectual influence remains palpable.

Indeed, both projects in Portugal and Ukraine exemplified Tony's collaborative approach and his commitment to developing archaeological capacity through student training, cooperative research, and international networking. He understood that archaeology advances through connections between people and excelled at building bridges. His work transformed the institutional infrastructures and scholarly expertise that continues to drive research in these countries today.

When one of us (JR) approached Tony in 2000 about pursuing doctoral research on early human expansions into Arabia, he was nearing retirement and winding down his fieldwork career. He took me on because, as he teased: "I was curious about Arabia and it seemed like you wouldn't be too much of a headache." That decision blossomed into a friendship and collaboration spanning 25 years, unexpectedly bringing Tony's career full circle in its twilight.

We mapped nearly 300 Middle Palaeolithic sites across the Dhofar region of southern Oman that bore the unmistakable signature of Nubian technology. The same distinctive technology from Sudan, which he had described in his dissertation half a century earlier, now appeared thousands



Fig. 1 Starosele 1992 excavation team photo. From left to right: Vitaly Usyk, Vladimir Vyklov, Tony Marks, Yuri Demidenko, Katherine Monigal



Fig. 2 Tony excavating in southern Oman during the 2023 field season

of kilometers away in southern Arabia. Tony never waxed poetic about this elegant symmetry bookending his career; he was too much of a pragmatist for that.

His output was prodigious: six edited volumes, including the landmark series on the Central Negev, 50 journal articles, over 60 book chapters, and dozens of reviews. Tony was exceptionally successful in securing research funding, including more than 25 grants from the National Science Foundation, Wenner-Gren Foundation, and Leakey Foundation spanning 1969 through 2003. He maintained continuous funding across four decades and secured several NSF Dissertation Improvement Grants for his doctoral students, enabling them to conduct their own independent fieldwork. In 1997, Tony was awarded the prestigious Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Research Award in recognition of his lifetime achievements.

He worked in the field until he was 85, swinging a pickaxe and scrambling up hillslopes, routinely outpacing colleagues more than half his age. He had been planning to return with us (JR & VU) for our next field season in Oman in November 2025. Tony's approach to archaeology was a

lifetime pursuit. He never stopped working, never stopped being curious, and, most remarkably for someone so formidable, never stopped questioning his own ideas. Those of us who worked with him in the field will remember him most vividly there: hunched over, picking through a lithic scatter under the desert sun (Fig. 2). In the evenings, you would hear the incessant musical clinking of lithics knocking against one another as he sorted through that day's haul, seeming to never need rest as long as there was more to discover.

Tony supervised over two dozen doctoral students, many of whom hold/held prominent positions: Donald Henry (University of Tulsa, deceased), Reid Ferring (University of North Texas), Daniel Kaufman (University of Haifa), Alan Simmons (University of Nevada), João Zilhão (University of Lisbon), Paul Thacker (Wake Forest University), Staša Forenbaher (Institute for Anthropological Research, Zagreb), Francisco Almeida (Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Australia), Karim Sadr (University of the Witwatersrand), Katherine Monigal, and many others.

His mentoring style was demanding. Tony didn't suffer fools, as most of his students can attest, dealing out a lash of his whip smart wit upon any intellectual misstep. He pushed students to think pragmatically and had little patience for abstract theory divorced from physical evidence. He taught practical skills and emphasized research projects with clear, obtainable answers. His growling, infamous catchphrase challenged us daily with a simple question: "What are you doing that's useful?" In the field, he sought the most efficient methods for the question at hand. He had no tolerance for time-wasting; collection strategies had to match the research problem. He believed regional patterns mattered, that isolated sites mean little without context, that technological analysis must connect to behavioral interpretation. And that sentences should never start with a conjunction.

His office door at SMU bore no nameplate, just a photograph of a fierce-looking wolf staring the visitor dead in the eye; that was introduction enough, evidently. His favorite t-shirts in the field bore such slogans as: "Stupidity kills... but not fast enough" or "Eat right, exercise, die anyway." But those who made it past his thorny exterior discovered someone warm, generous, and deeply committed to his students' success. In his spare time, he volunteered at a local sanctuary for wolves, his home was perpetually filled with rescued pets, and he was incapable of passing by any stray cat or dog without stopping to say hello.

Tony's loves extended far beyond animals and archaeology. He was a devoted patron of the arts, supporting local artists and collecting Japanese basketry and Southwestern

religious folk paintings. After his retirement in 2005, he scheduled his life around the Santa Fe Opera season. He took on the huge multi-year task of analyzing the old lithic collection from Mumba Cave held at the University of Tübingen, mostly so he and his wife could attend fall opera season in Germany.

Perhaps most eclectic was his passion for South American tax stamps. Tony assembled one of the world's most comprehensive collections, approaching philately with the same dedication he brought to lithic analysis. We (JR & VU) remember Tony calling it quits early one day at our excavation in Portugal, just to make it back to camp in time for an eBay auction closing. The hunt for tax stamps brought him the same satisfaction as finding a new site, and he was equally as good at it.

He lived 87 years and spent more than 60 of them doing archaeology. We were lucky to share part of that journey with him.

Tony is survived by his wife Kay Krochman Marks, his sister Jean M. Murphy, and by an international community of colleagues, collaborators, and former students who carry forward his legacy, ever asking ourselves that question he planted in all of us: “What are you doing that’s useful?”

Author Contributions J.R. - wrote manuscript text, N.B. - wrote manuscript text, V.U. - wrote manuscript text, F.W. - wrote manuscript text.

Data Availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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